

# New Life For Old Community Center

By Judy Epstein

Two years ago the Community Center was a decaying, bulky, and almost inert building — occupying one of the most prominent properties in the Common area at 3 North Main Street.

Today the Center is undergoing a renaissance — in its programs, activities and structures — and should emerge as successful as its locale is fine.

"We were a dissident group," explained President Jack Doherty of the five members who filled openings in the then governing board of directors last April. The Community Center which had been in existence since 1944, its sole purpose to entertain and educate the public at no profit, was about to close down last spring. The dissidents managed to get the board to agree to a general membership meeting.

One hundred members attended the meeting, and all the groups involved presented their sides. The most vociferous of these groups was from St. Stephen's church. Their plan was to take over the Center's liabilities and install housing for those with low or moderate incomes or for senior citizens. The membership, however, voted to maintain the Center and hence the heritage that accompanied the nursery school, the programs and the building itself was given another chance at survival.

Shortly, thereafter, the former board members resigned, and Doherty became president. A nominating committee was appointed to fill the 10 vacant positions, so that the board could operate with the needed quorum of eight people. Doherty said that the new board is a more representative one. "Now we have new people in town, older people and people in the middle." Those first few months were busy ones, Doherty said, as the board met once a week drafting vast policy changes.

At that time the Center had 77 paid members; one of the board's first goals was to attain 400 members by fall. It was also unanimously agreed that financing for renovation of the Center was in order. Herein lay a delicate balance, the need for money and members. Doherty explained, "The key to the success of the membership is in the courses and the bowling alleys." Armed with these objectives and a large volunteer staff the Community Center began an uphill climb — an ascent that soon exceeded its original expectations.

"The Oktoberfest put us back on the map," Doherty said of the fall extravaganza which featured crafts and white elephant tables, a pumpkin contest and German fare. The Program Committee was off to a good start under the direction of Judy Volungis, Jean Salvador and Regina Schulta. Their fall registration mailing offered all kinds of courses; they ranged, for example, from a "Tumble Tots"

gymnastic program for children, to "Disco Dancing" for adults, to a crepe-making workshop, to a fish and chowder demonstration. The membership drive headed by Martha Gjestby and Edward Jacome was more than on schedule, the debts were getting paid off — the Community Center was making a go of it.

Courses are open to members and prospective members of the Center, Doherty said, and therefore generate interest for membership. Family memberships are \$10 a year, individual memberships are \$5, and out-of-town memberships cost and additional two dollars. The recent registration added even more new courses than did the fall program. "They are mushrooming," Doherty attested. Some of the teachers are paid, some are volunteer; but the majority of the programs yield the instructors two-thirds of the remuneration while the Center receives one third.

When it was agreed that revitalization of the three-story building would be an added attraction to members, Rocco Laugelle, Building Director started plans for what was needed. Doherty believes that the Center had been floundering, in part, because of the defunct bowling alleys. The Building Inspector had condemned the alleys because the ceiling had been severely damaged from water leakage. Because funds were scarce, the Center enlisted the volunteer aid of a Marine Corps reserved squadron, known as the Wing Engineering Squadron 47 Combat Engineers, from the South Weymouth Naval Air Station.

One weekend a month since July the Marines have been working, ripping out the bowling alley ceiling, replacing sagging beams in the upstairs apartments and remodeling



NEW LIFE has been pumped into the handsome old Community Center which is enjoying its renaissance. (Greg Derr photo)

the Function Room. As a result, the bowling alleys are nearing a state of completion, the apartments have passed inspection and were recently rented and the Function Room is being readied for forthcoming wedding reception, lectures and what-have-you. Doherty was elected with the volunteer help, and the work accomplished; he was especially grateful for the renewed use of the bowling alleys which he predicted will be another "key to success" while it offers entertainment and exercise to all age groups.

A program that has remained stable during the Center's years of flux is the Nursery School. The program, under the direction of Nancy Putnam, is a tradition in Cohasset. Doherty said. Despite the Center's other changes, enrollment at the Nursery School has remained

fairly stable and now has 43 children attending. Daily sessions with separate classes for three and four year olds are run from 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

In the beginning building's Revenue for the facelift couldn't be met by the Center alone. Treasurer Jack Conroy felt that the building, worth \$125,000, could be used as collateral for a Small Business Loan to help with construction expenses. A total loan of \$66,400 will be going to the Center over a 25 year period — right now it eases renovation costs. Doherty said that so far \$5,000 have been spent; SBA reimburses the Center upon receipt of expenses incurred.

Although a lot of money is being spent, Doherty said that the Center doesn't plan to increase the dues. "We plan to get as many people in the Center as possible," he said.

Apparently, the plan is working, because the Center now boasts 525 memberships.

Just as the Center has flourished from the community's generosity so it extends its facilities to the public. Housed there are not only the aforementioned programs but also an array of other activities such as Girl Scout meetings, babysitting services and social security information.

The appreciation for the Community Center's tenacity and phoenix-like qualities have been rewarded by individual donations slated for a particular aspect of renovation. Though out of debt, money is ever a problem, and the Center is now in the process of applying for long-term grants. The membership committee will be conducting a local funding drive soon, so support your Community Center.

## Conservation

(continued from page 4)

galities, misrepresentations and exaggerations. When analyzed, every sentence is untruthful. That dishonest pronouncement has infected a group of state laws relating to fisheries. In the interest of honesty it should be repudiated, denounced and disavowed.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a Constitution which includes an amendment saying that the State does not intend to interfere with Town affairs. The Conservation Commission Act certainly does interfere with Cohasset's Town Government. Therefore it must be concluded that it is unconstitutional and without effect. It snatches away powers which the State conferred upon the Town and hands over those powers to the Conservation Commission. That is why complaint is made.

At the bottom of it is the subject of possible dredging and filling of salt marshes. Brownell was not satisfied with being fair and reasonable. He insisted that all salt marshes without excep-

tion be restricted, and without discrimination, and without approval by the Town. Some State Laws include the words "approval by the selectmen." Others leave out those words, which would mean "with town permission." Brownell assumed a bold, presumptuous, holier than thou attitude which apparently misled the Legislative Committee on Natural Resources. They naturally assumed that the legislation proposed by Brownell could be accepted with confidence. No impact study was made and the Conservation Commission Act was passed. It was one of two bad laws. The other was the Wetlands Restrictive Act, which authorized the commissioner to attach restrictions on deeds of land. All Cohasset marshes are prohibited. The writer is trying to get the restrictions removed from some marshland on Border St. and from Whale Meadow to permit beneficial projects if the Town wants them. A simple Act of the Legislature could remove those restrictions.

It now develops that there is a head-on confrontation in connection with the Coastal Zone Management Program. It is understood that the State would like to improve harbors, but at Cohasset the improvement of the harbor is prevented by the restrictions on deeds.

The salt marshes of numerous other towns have also been restricted, but they have not complained. Cohasset is different. We now have very little land remaining for town growth and development.

It is understood that some Massachusetts coastal towns have not been restricted, but that a person in Mr. Kendall's Department of Environmental Management is trying to get them restricted. The claim is made that "thousands of acres of salt marsh have been destroyed by developers." The claim is not substantiated. Where are those acres in Massachusetts? It is conceivable that they might have been ruined in respect to their usefulness to marine life, but they were not destroyed.

The dumping of some rubbish, or dirt at the edge of a salt marsh does not destroy it.

That document is in two parts. The second part is bad, but the first part is excellent. Some people are alarmed by misunderstanding that the first part is threatened. This is to definitely assure them that the explanation about the importance of salt marshes to marine life is very much applauded. In fact it is wished that a more comprehensive treatise be prepared to emphasize that ocean fish feed on smaller fish and smaller fish in turn feed on little fish that are nurtured in salt marshes. The importance of algae and plankton should also be discussed.

It is hoped that the Selectmen will ask Town Council to confirm that the Conservation Act conflicts with the work of the Planning Board. Cohasset did not know what it was doing when it accepted the Conservation Commission Act in 1961. Now the vote to accent should be rescinded by another Town Meeting vote.